GLOBAL CONFERENCE FOR A CASTE FREE WORLD 2025

Building Solidarity towards Equality, Social Justice and Abolition of Caste System

TORONTO DECLARATION

Global Conference for a Caste-Free World 2025 (May 25–27), Toronto, Canada

Building Solidarity Towards Equality, Social Justice, Freedom and the Abolition of Caste and Analogous Systems of Discrimination

Background

"All human beings are born free and equal," as articulated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Yet, caste-based division remains one of the most persistent and least addressed forms of social exclusion in the world. Originating from deeply entrenched religious and feudal structures over 3,000 years ago, caste systems have denied over 250 million people across the globe—including Dalits in South Asia, Burakumin in Japan, Roma in Europe, Haratin in Mauritania, Quilombolas in Brazil, Māori in New Zealand, Sami in Sweden, and their diasporic communities—basic human rights and access to dignity, equity, and opportunity.

Casteism is not confined to its origins in modern times; it is global in its reach. From India and Nepal to North America and the UK and beyond these countries, caste-based discrimination manifests as systemic denial of access to education, employment, political participation, land ownership, justice systems, and healthcare. Women and other gender minorities from caste-oppressed communities experience compounded discrimination through intersecting axes of gender, caste, ethnicity, and economic class.

Despite some progress made, atrocities continue happening unabated, as exemplified by the following recent facts:

- In India alone, the number of cases of crimes (57,582) against Scheduled Castes were registered in 2022, with a 13% rise from the previous year.
- In Nepal, Dalits remain 9 to 14 times more excluded than dominant castes as per national data on social exclusion.

- Across diasporas, caste bias silently persists in institutions, workplaces, and educational environments.

Preamble

We, the Delegates of the Global Conference for a Caste-Free World 2025, comprising affected communities, policymakers, civil society organizations, academics, students, and international allies, convened in Toronto, Canada, in May 2025, unite in solidarity for a just and equitable world free from all forms of discrimination, including caste and analogous systems rooted in work and descent.

This Conference marks a pivotal moment in our collective journey to dismantle entrenched systems of caste oppression. Caste-affected communities—including Dalits, Roma, Burakumin, Haratin, and Quilombolas—continue to suffer from exclusion, violence, restricted mobility, untouchability practices, and gross denial of identity and dignity. These injustices intersect with gender inequality, patriarchy, and socio-economic marginalization, creating compounded vulnerabilities for women, children, LGBTQI+ individuals, and persons with disabilities.

Rooted in principles of human dignity, justice, equality, freedom, and solidarity, we reaffirm our commitment to abolish all forms of caste discrimination and to build a world where every human being enjoys equal rights, opportunities, and dignity regardless of birth, occupation, ethnicity, descent, or identity. Understandably, identity by caste or any ethnic population groups is vital for reaffirming their existential status in the societies. However, the bottom line is that, while doing so, no caste or ethnic group has any rights to dehumanize and discriminate any other caste or ethnic groups, especially harming over 250 million peoples around the world in the 21st century. Therefore, the abolition of caste system that undermines the existence and dignity of any caste is a must in the 21st century.

We Salute

- The brave individuals and communities who have risked life and livelihood to resist caste-based oppression and claim their rightful dignity.
- The resilient women who have defied patriarchy and caste violence to assert their rights and transform society.
- The fearless youth and children who assert their humanity and resist systemic discrimination in education, culture, and employment.
- The enduring legacy of **Dr. B.R. Ambedkar**, whose vision and struggle for an egalitarian society continue to inspire movements across the world.

We Recognize

- That caste and analogous forms of discrimination persist across many societies despite decades of resistance along with legal and constitution reforms made in some countries.
- That these systems intersect with and reinforce other structures of oppression such as gender, poverty, and political exclusion.
- That impunity for caste-based violence and discrimination remains widespread, with justice and accountability mechanisms often inadequate.
- That affected communities and civil society have persistently raised their voices, yet international and national responses remain fragmented and insufficient.

We Acknowledge

- Progress made through affirmative action, constitutional provisions, and targeted policy measures in some countries.
- The value of key international instruments, further to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, such as:
    - International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), 1965
    - The *UN Draft Principles and Guidelines for the Elimination of Discrimination Based on Work and Descent, 2014*.
    - The *UN Guidance Tool on Descent-Based Discrimination, 2017*.
    - The *Africa Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) Resolution 619* on the protection of communities discriminated on work and descent, 2024.

Global Strategic Agenda for Dismantling the System of Caste Discrimination

1. Formal Global Recognition of Casteism

- Derecognize and denounce any hierarchy of high or low among, between and within caste identities around the world.
- Urge the United Nations and all member states to recognize caste-based discrimination as a form of descent-based human rights abuse on par with racism and apartheid.

- Advocate for the development of a UN Covenant on caste-based discrimination and descent-based injustice.
- Especially in countries such as Canada, human rights codes must be amended to include explicitly 'caste' as the protected category along with other categories such age, ancestry, gender etc.

2. Effective Enforcement of Anti-Discrimination Laws

- Ensure effective legal enforcement of the provisions of recognition and protection against caste discrimination, including caste as a protected category in Canada and other nations' human rights codes.
- Establish mechanisms for monitoring, enforcement, and accountability at national and local levels.

3. Caste Equity Through Educational Reform

- Integrate human dignity, equity, and anti-caste values and legal provisions into national education systems.
- Introduce *Critical Caste Theory* as a framework in educational curricula globally.
- Ensure higher education institutions are mandated to conducted research and studies on caste oppression with funding made available by national and international donor agencies.
- Promote and support, through educational opportunities, native arts and heritage, visual and performing arts of traditional occupational caste people who are discriminated or displaced by globalization for improving their livelihoods and prosperity through the development of their entrepreneurial skills.

4. Community-Led Empowerment and Leadership

- Fund community-led leadership programs to empower caste-oppressed individuals.
- Ensure equitable representation and agency in socio-economic, political, and civil domains.
- Support exploring and establishing ownership of intellectual property rights of native skills, arts and knowledge handed down from the heritage of communities discriminated by caste.

5. Establishment of a Global Caste Discrimination Index

- Develop a UN-backed index to measure caste-based inequality, analogous to the Human Rights Index.
- Mandate disaggregated data reporting in national development and human rights assessments.

6. Intersectional Research and Evidence-Based Policy

- Invest in research exploring the intersections of caste with health, housing, education, gender, and labor.
- Use disaggregated data to inform reparative policy and equitable budget allocations across governments and international communities including the UN systems.

7. Aligning Reparative Justice with the SDGs

- Align national caste-reparative strategies with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- Create a global humanitarian fund for caste-oppressed groups.

8. Recognition and Restitution of Historical Injustices

- Issue public apologies and provide reparations including land reform, inclusive education, and political representation.

9. Socioeconomic Restructuring and Affirmative Action

- Implement affirmative action across employment, housing, and state resources.
- Support of national and multi-lateral governmental and private sectors for establishing development banks under the leadership of caste-oppressed stakeholders.

10. Youth-Led Caste and Racial Justice Movements

- Empower youth to lead anti-caste and racial justice movements.
- Mainstream indigenous arts, skills, and knowledge of caste-oppressed groups in educational systems.

11. Healing Intergenerational Trauma

- Recognize and address the psychological impacts of caste trauma.
- Support healing initiatives through culture, dialogue, and community restoration.

12. Global Political Representation and Institutional Reform

- Ensure proportionate political representation of caste-oppressed communities at all levels of state governance.
- Reform institutions to uphold inclusive governance.

13. Legal and Policy Transformation

- Dismantle caste hierarchies through legal, constitutional, and policy reforms.
- Model inclusive frameworks on successful examples from countries like Canada.

14. Cultural Change and Public Awareness

- Eliminate casteist cultural expressions and promote inclusive narratives in media, religion, and education.
- Collaborate with cultural and religious leaders to shift societal norms.

15. Mainstream Allyship and Anti-Casteism Training

- Mandate allyship training for government officials, institutions, and civil society leaders.
- Promote accurate understanding of caste discrimination through ongoing education.

16. Human Rights Training for Migrants

- Make human rights and anti-casteism education a standard part of immigration and integration programs globally.
- Provide humanitarian protection and asylum to those fleeing caste-based persecution and ostracization.

17. Truth and Reconciliation

- Establish national Truth and Reconciliation Commissions to address caste atrocities and chart a path for dismantling caste systems permanently.

Conclusion and Way Forward

As we progress through the 21st century, the **Toronto Declaration** calls for immediate, coordinated, and systemic action to eliminate caste and descent-based discrimination globally within the reasonable time-frame of a grace period after the first quarter of this century, which we consider as the deadline to end detrimental impacts of caste.

We urge:

- **The United Nations**
- **National and local governments**
- **International donors and development institutions**
- **Civil society organizations**
- **Academic and research bodies**
- **Media, cultural institutions, and private sectors**

to adopt and implement this Declaration. Let us together end caste-based oppression in this generation and ensure that no one is denied dignity and opportunity because of their birth.

Let the Toronto Declaration be the moral compass for a caste-free world!

For further details, please contact:

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